

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION MEETING

APPROVED Minutes

January 21, 2021

Meeting occurred via WebEx Teleconferencing

Chair Scott Markow called meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Scott Markow, (Chair), Bianca Chang (Vice Chair), Joshua Kaufman (Corresponding Secretary), Mabrooka Chaudhry, Lynda Earle, Bob Ford, Joan Hash, Peter Hwang, Joshua Kaufmann, Leslie Salgado- Tamayo, Gabriel Terrasa, and Jonathon Di Pietro (Student Commissioner)

Absent: Kui Zhao

Staff Present: Yolanda F. Sonnier (Executive Secretary) and Chaunta Taylor (Recording Secretary)

Legal Counsel: Melissa Goldmeier

Public Attendees Present: Mr. Keith A. Merkey, Education and Outreach Associate with the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (MCCR).

I. PUBLIC FORUM

Mr. Keith Merkey was present and brought greetings to all from Maryland Commission on Civil Rights. He mentioned that MCCR will be reaching out to Howard County to collaborate on educational training. He mentioned MCCR will have virtual upcoming training sessions that will be open to the public on topics such as Diversity, Conflict Resolution and Knowing Your Rights. He also mentioned that it's important that the community is aware of not only the County but the State rules as well. Scott mentioned to Keith that he should follow up with Yolanda to collaborate.

II. APPROVAL OF DECEMBER 17, 2020 MINUTES

Scott asked Chaunta if all the corrections had been made and sent to the Commissioners for review. Chaunta responded that the corrections were made but they had not yet been sent out for final review. Scott requested that Chaunta email the final version to the Commissioners to review. He also mentioned that the **December 17, 2020 draft minutes** will be tabled until next month for approval since they had not yet been reviewed.

III. CHAIR'S REPORT – SCOTT

Scott wished everyone a Happy New Year and hoped that everyone had a peaceful, relaxing and healthy holiday. He thanked the Commissioners, Yolanda and Chaunta for a great 2020 and mentioned that we accomplished a lot this year compared to prior years especially during a pandemic. Scott also thanked Bob for his two years of service as Chair. He said that it was a job well done. Lastly, he thanked Bianca as the new Vice- Chair and Joshua Kaufman for accepting the newly formed position of Correspondence Secretary.

Martin Luther King Presentation:

Scott asked if anyone seen the virtual MLK presentation stating that it was professionally well done. He suggested that anyone who had not yet seen it, do so while it is still available online. Joan indicated that she had seen it and agreed with Scott's assessment.

Reconsideration:

Scott mentioned the meeting scheduled for January 26, 2021 at 1pm, and asked Joan and Bob to confirm their attendance. Both Joan and Bob confirmed they will be in attendance at the meeting. Scott mentioned to Yolanda and Chaunta that he noticed the meeting was scheduled for 4 hours and suggested that if it is going to be longer than 1 hour we would need to reschedule. After deliberating on past reconsideration meetings, it was concluded that the meeting time will be modified to 1 hour.

Yom Kippur - September 16, 2021:

Scott mentioned that although it's a long way off, The September 16, 2021 meeting will fall on Yom Kippur and therefore the meeting will need to be rescheduled for another day due to the fact that the County is not allowed to conduct meetings on that day. The Commission deliberated on which day would work in September where most commissioners would be able to attend. The Commissioners agreed on Tuesday, September 14, 2021. Joshua made a motion to move the September meeting to 14th and Joan seconded the motion. All Commissioners in attendance unanimously agreed. **The September 16, 2021 meeting will be held on Tuesday, September 14, 2021.**

Vaccine Distribution:

Scott mentioned that he noticed the inequity with locating information on services or signing up to get the vaccine with the Health Dept. in Howard County and other places in Maryland. He stated that his concern that the word isn't getting out to our immigration and low-income communities on how to access the information. Scott noted that the information is only in 3 languages (English, Spanish and Chinese) and there are more languages that individuals speak within the community. Scott inquired as to whether OHRE and HRC Outreach can work together to come up with a plan to help the community get the information, with the understanding that they will not be asked to provide their immigration status when they go to get services. Yolanda mentioned that she received an email from DCRS about disseminating information about on how you can sign up or get information about the vaccine and she offered to forward the email. Yolanda suggested that each Commissioner distribute the information with at least one organization. Scott asked if OHRE can put the information on their social media networks. Mabrooka stated that she received the email from DCRS and noted that there is a phone number to call to complete the survey online for those who need accommodation or assistance. Scott asked Mabrooka if she could forward that email to the Commissioners. Bianca stated that the survey monkey has the options to click on different languages, however the 2nd link that defines the age is incorrect. Bianca suggested that the Commissioners should discuss it during the upcoming retreat. Bianca also mentioned when you get to the facility they still ask for your age and you must provide proof of age. Leslie mentioned she has received information from the County in English and Spanish and that is the information she shares. Leslie also mentioned that if Howard County is following federal laws they are required to provide the necessary information in additional languages, not just Spanish.

2020 Annual Report Status:

Scott asked Mabrooka for an update on the Annual Report. Mabrooka stated that she received additional changes which she will incorporate after which the report will be finalized.

Immigration Report Status:

Scott asked what was the status of the report? Bob stated to his knowledge it was sent by the end of the year. Scott asked if the letter to the Coalition been drafted and sent. Joshua stated that he is working on two letters and he will discuss it under new business. Yolanda mentioned that Chaunta posted it today on the HRC & OHRE website. Due to the file size, Chaunta had to coordinate with IT staff because there are some font issues.

Lynda stated she had hoped the letter and the document are distributed together. Yolanda stated that the report is accessible on the County website today. Yolanda also mentioned that the report was distributed to the County Executive and that we will circle back to make sure we sent it to County Council. Leslie mentioned at the last meeting it was stated Joshua and herself were to be notified before distribution of the report. Leslie also mentioned its unreasonable for this process to take an entire month to distribute a document that took a year to compile. Joshua asked for clarification on report and letter. Bob clarified any confusion regarding the two. Scott stated the report has already been posted we will address the rest of this conversation during New Business.

Renaming Annual Award:

Scott asked Yolanda whether she preferred to discuss renaming the annual award now or during her report. Yolanda mentioned that there was discussion last year about renaming the student award. Yolanda spoke with the County Administration about the naming of awards and the County has a preference for naming awards after someone with local ties to the County. The recommendation from County Executive was to name the award after Mr. James Henson. Mr. Henson was a previous Administrator for The Office of Human Rights, he worked in the Law Dept., formed a local bar association for African Americans Attorneys (Waring Mitchell Law Society), and stayed involved in Civil and Human Rights after leaving the office. Yolanda mentioned (per Melissa) that the commission has to vote on renaming the award. Lynda added that Mr. Henson recently passed away. Scott asked about the County view of renaming the award after John Lewis or is the CEX set on naming the award after someone with local ties. Yolanda responded: yes, correct. Scott asked anyone wanted to discuss or make a motion. Lynda stated she would like to investigate other names in HC that could be considered. Gab suggested that we allow the Awards Committee to further discuss, research, and bring back suggestions to the Commissioners for a vote. Scott agreed and asked the Awards Committee to come back in a month or so.

Commissioner Reappointments:

Scott mentioned Joan and Peter both expressed a desire to be reappointed for a second term. The term will be 3 years because the new rule passed from 5 years to 3 years. Scott mentioned the Commission does not have a formal procedure on how we make recommendation to CEX on new appointments or reappointments. The Commission voted on recommending Joan and Peter to CEX by a poll vote. The Nominating Committee can come up with procedural recommendations to discuss with the Commission at a later date to have a clear definition.

Scott made a motion to recommend Peter to CEX for reappointment for a second term and Lynda 2nd the motion. The Commission unanimously agreed to recommend Peter for a second term.

Bob made a motion to recommend Joan to CEX for reappointment for a second term and Peter 2nd the motion. The Commission unanimously agreed to recommend Joan for a second term.

Scott mentioned that Jonathon's term is coming to end, and we need to start the process for a new Student Commissioner. Chaunta stated she spoke with Kimberly Pruim and she will get an email out to the Nominating Committee on the application process for the student position. All the Commissioners thanked Jonathon for his hard work. Jonathon stated that he is willing to assist with getting the message out to get a new student commissioner.

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY REPORT

Yolanda provided the Executive Secretary Report which included the following:

The two open positions in the OHRE have been filled. The Compliance Officer position has been filled by Chey Martineau, who has been an Investigator with OHRE for 8 years. The Equity and Restorative Practice Manager position was filled by Dr. Denise Boston. Dr. Boston will be working on equity in the County. She is currently in her assessment period and she will be working on creating a 3-year strategic plan and at some point, circle around to talk to the commissioners to get feedback. CEX held a press conference last week to introduce Dr. Boston. she agreed to facilitate the HRC retreat. Promoting Chey has a created an open vacancy for the Investigator position in the office and the position will be posted.

We had 3 HBI incidents for this month. Outreach continues to do a number of activities. We held our 1st virtual Kwanzaa in December, it was a prerecorded virtual presentation, 7 symbols over 7 days and a prerecorded story time book reading presented by Donna Washington. We have a number of events that Trent is working on with students and Youth and Conversation twice a month. Courageous Conversation is open for registration it was created by Elijah Cummings to have conversations centered around race, they are held Tuesdays in February at 7pm. Yolanda mentioned, Trent and herself will be facilitators. The link to the website to register was put in the chat box. The Outreach staff continues to conduct monthly Bystander Intervention Trainings (BIT). They recently did the BIT with Harford County.

We are unable to gather for the Lunar New Year, due to COVID. PIO and CEX will be releasing a video and the OHRE will submit a greeting as well.

The MLK Commission held a pop-up pantry that was held on 1/15 and chaired by Bert Hash. They had enough food to feed 400 families. There will be another pop-up pantry in February. On the MLK day of service, the MLK Commission goes to local grocery stores requesting perishable items. If HRC wants to volunteer, please consider. You have a year to think about it.

LGBTQ+ work group met on 1/27 from 6pm-8pm and the group is coming to the end of its term and has to submit a report to CEX. Part of their recommendation should include if this workgroup should be a permanent Commission.

La Alianza Latina's next meeting is 2/9 at 6pm and they have established 4 different committees.

Yolanda stated that Chaunta sent out a roster and requested that if you haven't confirmed your contact information please respond to her email. Yolanda asked Scott if we are discussing the retreat because Chaunta has a question to ask at that time.

IV. STUDENT REPORT

Jonathan mentioned Happy New Year and congratulated Yolanda on her MLK speech presented during the presentation. Regarding his position as a student commissioner, unfortunately due to the conclusion of his last semester in school, has been an impact with the overload of assignments. On his to do list, he plans to send the letter to HCPSS regarding the hate bias incident and request to get data.

He hopes to have feedback in a few days. Jonathon mentioned that he will also be working on finding a successor for his position. Jonathon mentioned he received his 1st college acceptance to Seton Hall University over the break. Joshua mentioned that he can send him the logistics and he will formalize the letter for HCPSS. The Commissioners congratulated Jonathon on his 1st college acceptance.

Joan mentioned that she saw in the paper about a student being attacked because he voted on a school board issue. Joan asked Jonathon if he had heard anything and if he has a perspective about it. Jonathon responded that he absolutely wants to address this issue directly. Jonathon said the student is his friend and thinks it is important to address bullying and address it. He feels that the way that the community has addressed it is inappropriate. He feels strongly about voting rights and working with legislators to respond to the lawsuit and school system.

Lastly, he reported that they have received a sponsor for his student demonstration bill and will be proposed in the upcoming weeks. They are still coordinating with other schools to make sure schools implement policies that accurately reflect goals outlined in the legislation.

V. COMMITTEE REPORTS

a. Nominating:

Peter mentioned nothing to update, but stated he agreed with creating rules and procedures for recommending new prospective commissioners and reappointing commissioners. Scott tasked the committee to work on the task in the next few months.

b. Awards:

Bianca mentioned the letters have been sent to the nominees and nominator. The thank you letter, certificate and \$50.00 gift card to the student for singing the National Anthem were sent. Bianca thanked Chaunta for her assistance with getting the information out.

Bianca mentioned, discussing the future HRC award ceremony what will be the format and timing. Bianca stated that having the event in the spring is too close to last year and we probably won't be allowed to have an in person setting. Bianca suggested pushing the event to fall. Bianca asked the commissioners if they had any recommendations.

Bianca mentioned any thoughts on the date and if we should we move the event to fall? Joshua asked Bianca if she's suggesting having the event later in case we can do it in person. Bianca stated yes. Joan agreed with pushing it back to fall and hopefully COVID will be behind us. Scott suggested that Bianca and Yolanda have a conversation and come up with two dates,. and then bring it to the meeting and the Commission will vote on a date.

c. Outreach:

Mabrooka, mentioned we already addressed the annual report and the changes are being made. Mabrooka asked for clarification on who should get the report for review. Scott responded that she should send it to everyone. Mabrooka agreed and will include Chaunta, and Yolanda to confirm the format, and make changes if any. Mabrooka asked if the final report will be available online? Yolanda stated yes at the end of February with the OHRE annual report. Mabrooka mentioned Outreach has been restricted due to COVID.

d. Civic Participation (Census/Voting):

Kui is out, Mabrooka stated the census was done in October therefore this committee is done reporting.

e. Hate Crimes:

Joshua nothing to report at this time.

f. Legislation:

Scott mentioned he put together a report, it was sent to Chaunta late in the day. He asked Chaunta to email the report to the Commissioners after the meeting. Scott mentioned he will talk about what was written in his report.

g. Immigration:

Joan mentioned we need to discuss if we need this committee at the retreat. Bob mentioned that the Liberty Act was passed making Howard County a Sanctuary County, he also mentioned there was an individual at Supermarket asking for signatures to put it on the ballot.

Leslie asked what happens once CEX and Council gets the Immigration report. Yolanda stated it is up to the Commissioners and what they want to happen. Joan stated the last report the Commissioner sent to CEX and Council they were asked to meet with Council. She hopes that there is a research segment to hopefully identify any issues prior to implementing the recommendations.

Retreat

Scott reminded the Commissioners that the retreat is Saturday, January 30th at 10:00am – 12:30pm. Scott mentioned that the Retreat Committee has been working with Denise Boston on the agenda and Ms. Boston has agreed to facilitate the retreat. Scott went over the agenda and what to expect during the retreat. Joshua asked why equity is the theme of the retreat. Scott stated to define what equity means to look at what we are doing through an equity lens. Mabrooka stated we reviewed the mission, vision and purpose from that last retreat and equity was part of our mission. Bianca included it just a starting point conversation. Yolanda informed the Commissioners that they will receive a new WebEx link to accommodate breakout rooms so don't be alarmed when you get Chaunta's canceled request. Scott asked will it be added to the website since the public are allowed and Yolanda stated yes.

Chaunta mentioned that since we are unable to meet in person and fellowship, the office wanted to give the commissioners a retreat treat. Chaunta informed the commissioners that they will receive a \$10.00 gift card to Starbucks or Dunkin Donuts, by email, and they should choose the card they prefer.

VI. NEW BUSINESS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

Joshua discussed two letters, and thanked Leslie for her feedback. Joshua noted he made a few changes. Joshua mentioned the letters will be completed tomorrow or Saturday. Joshua asked for clarity on who he should define as Chair on the letter, Bob or Scott. Lynda stated we were going to use Bob because he was the Chair at the time. Scott replied that the letter for CEX. Joshua asked if we had letterhead. Chaunta stated yes, we have the revised letterhead and she will forward to Joshua along with Scott's signature. Jonathon asked if his name is not on the letterhead if he could be included in the letter. Joshua asked what the procedure are for reviewing and approving. Scott stated the 1st order of the Correspondence Secretary with procedures. Joshua responded, he understood but

until that is done how should we get these current letters out. Joshua recommended that action can be taken at a meeting, then the expert on the subject matter will provide feedback, then the Chair, and Corresponding Secretary and the expert would be delegated authority for approval of the content. Peter agreed with Joshua's recommendation. Josh mentioned streamlining the process to get letter out quicker. Gab stated the commissioners should review final version. Bob asked Joshua what details will be included in the Immigration Coalition letter? Joshua explained in detail. The commission cleared the difference between a letter and report. Scott asked Melissa if we circulate a letter by email to Commissioners for review or if it violates the Open Meetings Act? Melissa responded, yes if it has only comments or deliberations. Peter stated it a fine line and rather not deal with issue but allow people to add comments. Scott asked if we should make a motion.

Joshua made the motion to establish procedure for guiding the role of Corresponding Secretary. The procedures will include the following:

1. The Commission as a whole will approve sending out correspondence and will provide guidance on the agreed upon message to the Corresponding Secretary.
2. The Corresponding Secretary, Chair and designated expert will form a sub-committee to draft and approve the letter.

Joan seconded the motion.

Peter noted that in the procedure, the Commissioners are able to opt in to provide input.

The Commission unanimously agreed and the motion passed.

Joshua mentioned that he will send the drafted letter for the Coalition to Leslie and Scott for review. It will be drafted no later than Saturday. Scott asked if any other Commissioners wanted to review the letter. Lynda and Bianca responded yes. Scott mentioned forming a subcommittee now to draft Jonathon's letter to HCPSS. Scott asked other than Joshua, Jonathon and himself, would others like to be involved. Mabrooka responded that she would like to be involved.

Jonathan stated he had a quick question for counsel about the OMA. He wanted to know to what extent are personal emails open to public information, especially since a lot of us are using personal emails. Melissa responded any time you are transacting public business the method from which you are transacting it would be subject to a PIA request and disclosable unless there is an exemption. It has to do with the content not the source.

VII. CLOSED SESSION

Closed session was called to discuss an HRC Case No. 20-11-009. Commissioners voted to affirm OHRE finding of no cause.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

- Motion to adjourn the meeting made by Bob and 2nd by Gab. All Commissioner voted in favor meeting adjourned.
- Meeting Adjourned at 9:02 pm.